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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the recent wave of school reform literature has neglected females, thereby threatening to close already narrowing windows of opportunity for their advanced education beyond high school. A line-by-line content analysis of 138 articles on educational reform published in nine influential professional journals between 1983 and January 1987, showed that the educational reform movement largely ignores issues of gender equity, and that males far outnumber females in authorship and in depiction in photos and illustrations. The report concludes by making the following recommendations to enhance equity in education, which the Excellence in Education movement ignores: (1) Classroom interaction between teachers and students must include more minority and female participation. (2) Curriculum content must address the academic problem areas that have historically plagued female students, chiefly in mathematics and science, in the same ways that remedial reading programs have traditionally been programmed for males. (3) Understanding why females and minority groups score lower than white males on standardized tests despite higher report card grades requires research. (4) Career counseling reform is needed to avoid course and career segregation and stereotyping. (5) The recruitment and retention of females in educational leadership positions will ensure supervision sensitive to the negative outcomes of gender bias in our nation's schools. (JAM)

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Equity and Excellence in Education Reform:
An Unfinished Agenda

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In 1983, a wave of startling reports and studies washed across the headlines, riveting the public's attention on America's schools. Our nation's diminished capacity to compete in worldwide markets had triggered new and intense interest in schools. After years of neglect, the spotlight was once again on education. Other reform reports followed, ensuring that the spotlight would not move on quickly.

The first wave of education reform reports focused on raising standards, increasing rigor, encouraging accountability. But even as these reports flooded the education landscape of the early 1980s, a second wave of reform mounted and the agenda shifted. There was renewed attention to higher-order thinking and creativity as well as the resurrection of phrases from an earlier time - flexibility, collegiality, and a climate of trust.

Although reform's second wave shifted the spotlight, a blind spot remains. National test scores provide focus for the problem. Girls are losing ground as boys pull ahead academically. Not only is the problems unresolved; in most circles it is not even acknowledged. The ebbing potential of girls lies forgotten in the wake of education reform.

The Nation's Blind Spot

Those who study bias in instructional materials are well aware that one of its most pervasive and damaging forms is the omission or invisibility of the achievements and concerns of entire groups. It is likely that no task force or individual writer intentionally omitted the issue of gender from education

reform. But taken as a group the reports go on record with what they have not said. There is an eerie silence on one of education's most shocking and perplexing problems - the growing achievement gap between male and female students.

Tetreault and Schmuck content analyzed seven of the first wave reform reports and found the silence deafening.[1] For example, they note that Goodlad's eight year study, A Place Called School, did not mention sex discrimination. While the need for educational equality on the basis of "race, color, religion and national origin" was included, "gender" was not. When federal equity legislation was discussed, Title IX was not. When racism and classism in vocational education were analyzed, there was no mention of sex segregation within vocational programs.

Ted Sizer in Horace's Compromise and Sara Lawrence Lightfoot in The Good High School each referred to problems of sex bias very briefly but did not offer thorough discussion. A Nation at Risk, Making the Grade, and The Paideia Proposal omitted gender as a meaningful category. The only report that dealt specifically, although cursorily, with gender was Action for Excellence calling for the increased participation of women and minorities in math and science. Follow up reports, such as What Works (1986) provided a helpful research synthesis on effective education strategies, but continued to omit research on effective strategies for closing the gender gap in achievement.

Professional Reaction to Education Reform: A Four Year Dialogue

Since 1983 we located approximately 400 papers presented and grant and professional association reports on educational reform as well as 500 journal articles on this topic. The professional reaction has been not only prolific but also diverse. While many authors have exhorted their colleagues to jump on the reform bandwagon, other authors have found the reform bandwagon itself in need of reform. Whatever their perspective, this published body of professional reaction has expanded the interpretation of reform and has taken on a life of its own.

Of these 900 papers, reports and articles only 40 made the issue of equity and education reform a major focus. To determine more exactly whether the dialogue surrounding education reform continues to ignore the issue of gender equity in general we conducted a line by line content analysis of articles on reform appearing between 1983 and January 1987 in nine influential professional journals recognized for their policy and practice leadership in the profession. A content analysis instrument was designed and a team of raters trained in its use. Inter-rater reliability was established and maintained at 85 percent agreement. In all, during this period, 138 articles concerned with educational reform were published in these leading journals. Fifty-eight of the articles analyzed were published in Phi Delta Kappan, twenty six in Educational Leadership, twenty six in The National Association of Secondary School Principals, eight in the

Journal of Teacher Education, five in the American School Board Journal, five in Teachers' College Record, four in The Elementary School Journal, four in Harvard Educational Review, and two in the Review of Educational Research (see Figure 1). Each of these articles was subjected to a comprehensive line-by-line content analysis.

The 138 articles examined were strikingly diverse in content and tone. So much so, it seemed that the term "reform movement" had become an umbrella under which every imaginable topic might be addressed. However certain themes or topics did emerge repeatedly, and were grouped into the following categories.

1. Summaries, articles providing a synopsis of one or more reform reports.

2. Support, in which authors expressed clear advocacy of education reform and urged their colleagues to become involved in the movement.

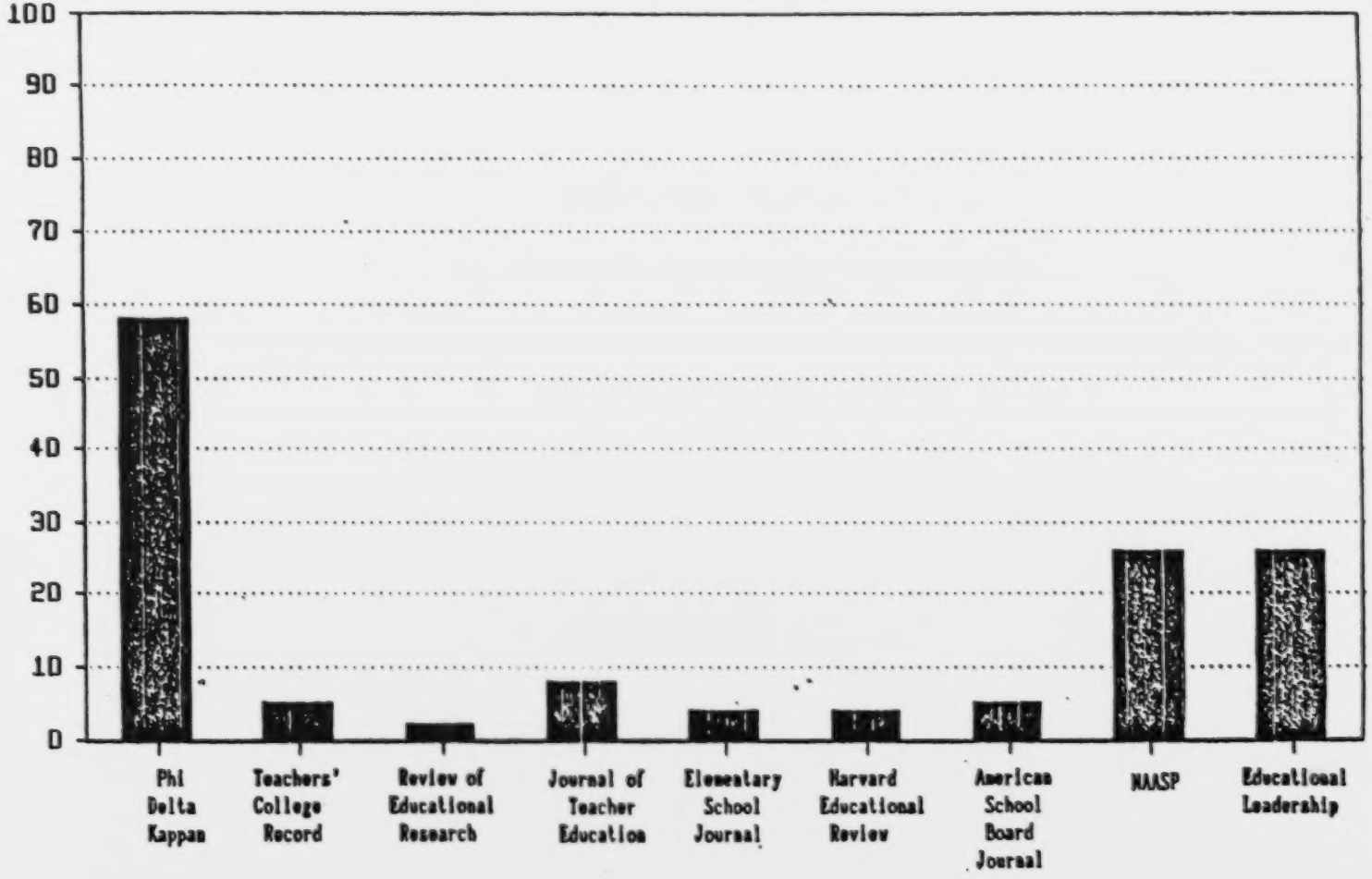
3. Critiques, articles expressing concern about one or more aspects of reform. While the stridently critical article was rare, almost half of the articles articulated problems or expressed caution about some aspect of reform.

4. State and local efforts, articles describing attempts at reform in individual schools or in a particular state.

5. Historical perspective, articles comparing and contrasting the current movement to reforms of earlier times. Several articles also suggested future reform directions.

Figure 1

Frequency of Articles Concerned with the Reform Movement



6. Teacher preparation, articles reacting to the Holmes and Carnegie reports, and bemoaning the lack of quality in teacher education.

7. Miscellaneous, a category including a wide range of issues. Despite diversity, some common themes deserve mention. Topics addressed by four or more articles included internal reform, especially in Asia; legal and financial concerns of reform in the United States; and the need for educational partnerships and cooperative efforts.

Since this study focused on articles published between 1983 and January 1987, the initial reaction was to A Nation at Risk and, to a lesser extent, the first wave of education reform. Several of the articles published in 1983 and 1984 were by report authors who summarized their own books or reports and often urged the involvement of others. Predictably, 1984 and 1985 articles were reactions, positive and negative, to the initial reports and summaries. 1986 was the year of teacher education with summaries of and reactions to the Holmes and Carnegie reports.

Twenty-five articles called for more state and local involvement or described efforts in states such as New York, California, South Carolina, Minnesota, Florida, Connecticut, and Tennessee. Another frequently discussed topic was teacher preparation with nineteen articles discussing the Holmes and Carnegie reports and debating how teachers are best prepared.

A surprising 59 articles expressed reservations about jumping on the education reform bandwagon. Phrases such as

"quick fix," "test driven," "top down," "mechanistic," and "remote control reform" were common. Despite an across the board array of reservations, three concerns emerged repeatedly: omissions; the balance between equity and excellence; and the need for an increased leadership by education professionals. Several of the articles pointed out items missing from the reform agenda, such as vocational education, moral education, creativity, and the arts. Another major concern focused on the imbalance between equity and excellence, with authors warning of lost ground for less able learners, territory hard won over the last decades. The third concern was the absence of teachers and principals. These articles charged that education reform was driven by blue ribbon panels and experts who had not set foot in classrooms since their student days. Authors called for those with day to day professional experience in schools to assume greater leadership in reforming the profession.

Based on the authorship of the 138 articles analyzed, there seems to be merit to this final charge. Over 90 percent of the authors of the reform report articles were professors, state and federal government personnel, chief state school officers, governors, writers, editors, or consultants. Only 13 of the authors were teachers and principals, those who work in school buildings and come into daily contact with elementary and secondary school students.

The 138 articles analyzed offered almost 300 recommendations to improve education. Eighty-four of the recommendations

were focused on curriculum and instruction. A common theme was the need to institute a core curriculum for all students and eliminate frills and electives. Authors also advocated more emphasis on the basics, especially math, science, and technology; they called for more homework, and reduced class size. While the emphasis was on a core academic curriculum and higher standards, there was a minor counter theme calling for student empowerment and continued curricular choice, especially in vocational education.

Authors made 77 recommendations about the teaching profession, with particular emphasis on how teachers are prepared and paid. While there was general agreement on the need for more liberal arts, there was consensus on little else. Some authors recommended maintaining or increasing courses on pedagogy; other authors said these courses should be cut back. There was disagreement not only on how teachers should be prepared, but also on how they should be paid, with an active debate on the merits of merit pay.

With 46 recommendations, school climate was another area of emphasis. Common themes included the need for more collegial relationships among teachers and greater cooperation between schools and parents. Several recommendations called for structural change, such as lengthening the school day or year so that more time could be spent teaching children.

The Silent Treatment

The 138 articles contained 68,660 lines. Approximately 10 percent of this content was concerned with the broad issue of equity. Sometimes entire articles focused on this issue, but more typically equity was one of several concerns authors raised about education reform. Authors worried that the reform movement was elitist with too much attention paid to the college bound. They said that inadequate efforts had been made to help less able students meet the new higher standards and that reform would result in a higher student drop out rate. Specifically targeted problems included the detrimental effects of tracking and the negative impact of competency tests on the nation's minority teachers.

Only one percent of article content pertained to gender equity and even this minuscule amount of information treated the topics as an afterthought. Typically phrases such as gender equity, sex equity, or the needs of girls/females/women were tagged on to an article whose main focus was something else. Except for one article, no author discussed issues of sex differential treatment in classroom interaction, in athletics, or in the curriculum. Except for one article, no author noted the achievement gender gap as measured by the National Assessment of Education Progress, the Scholastic Aptitude Test, or the Graduate Record Exam. In the professional dialogue about education reform, gender equity received the silent treatment. At best, it was a tag-along topic.

Journals that gave the least attention to equity were the National Association of Secondary School Principals, Educational Leadership, The Journal of Teacher Education, Teachers' College Record, and the Elementary School Journal. Containing by far the largest number of articles, Phi Delta Kappan was slightly above average with 13 percent of content devoted to the broad issue of equity and three percent of this on gender equity. The four article in the Harvard Educational Review gave 30 percent of content to equity. However, less than one percent of this was on gender equity. Almost 60 percent of the two articles in the Review of Educational Review were on equity and seven percent of this was on gender equity (see Figure 2).

Women were absent not only from narrative content but from authorship and illustrations as well. A total of 183 authors wrote the articles on education reform included in this study. Only 38 of these were female. 685 authors and researchers were noted in bibliographic citations; 518 of these were men (see Figures 3 through 6).

Sometimes the journals, particularly Phi Delta Kappan and Educational Leadership attempted to enhance narrative with drawings and photographs. While the photographs were fairly equitable on the basis of gender with 86 males and 71 females, only 12 minority group members were depicted. Drawings, the product of an illustrator's mind rather than a snapshot of reality, were far more biased with almost twice as many males as females and amazingly only three minority group members included

Figure 2

Percentage of Article Content Concerned with Equity/Sex Equity

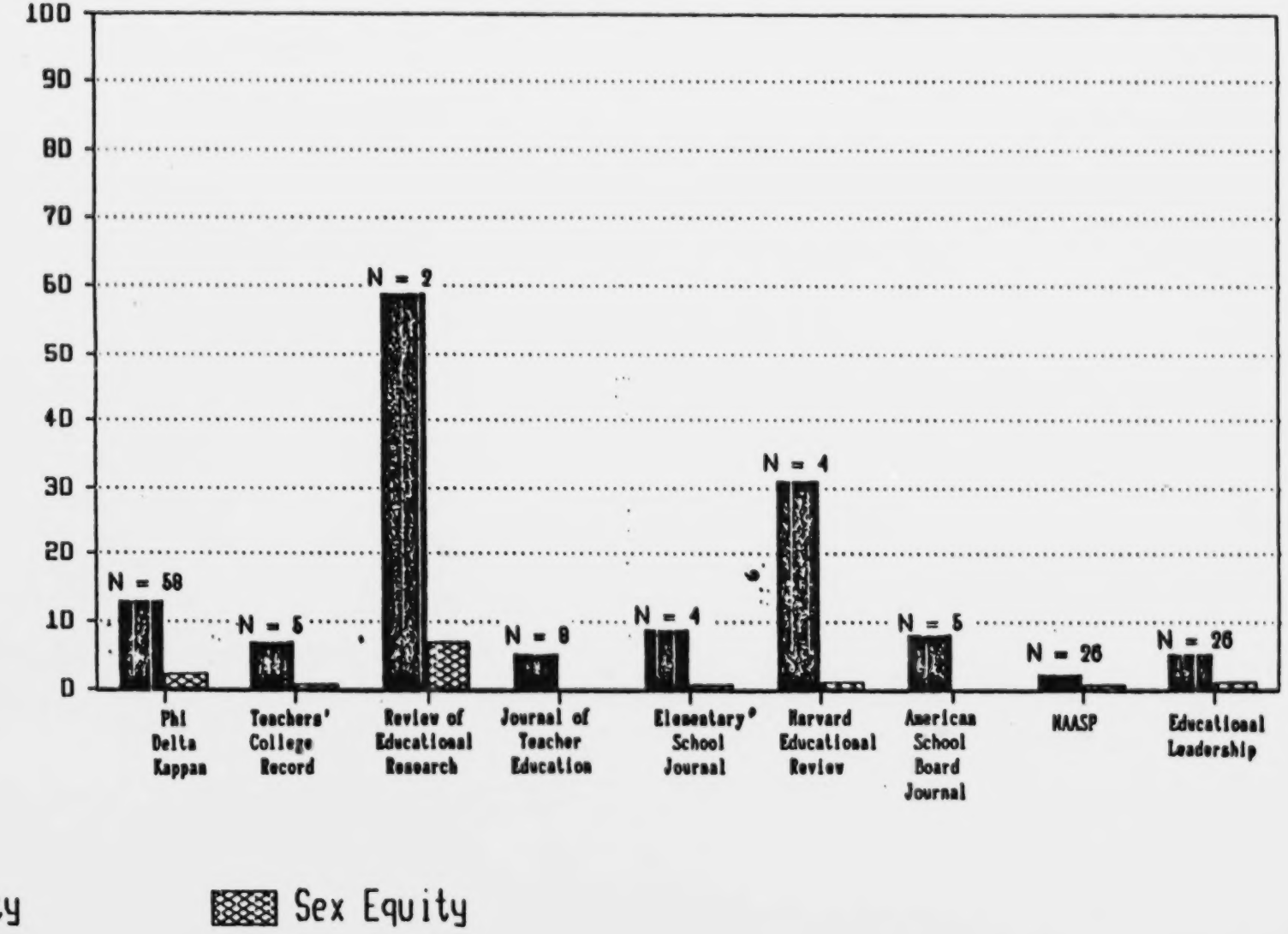


Figure 3

Percentage of Reform Articles Authored by Males/Females

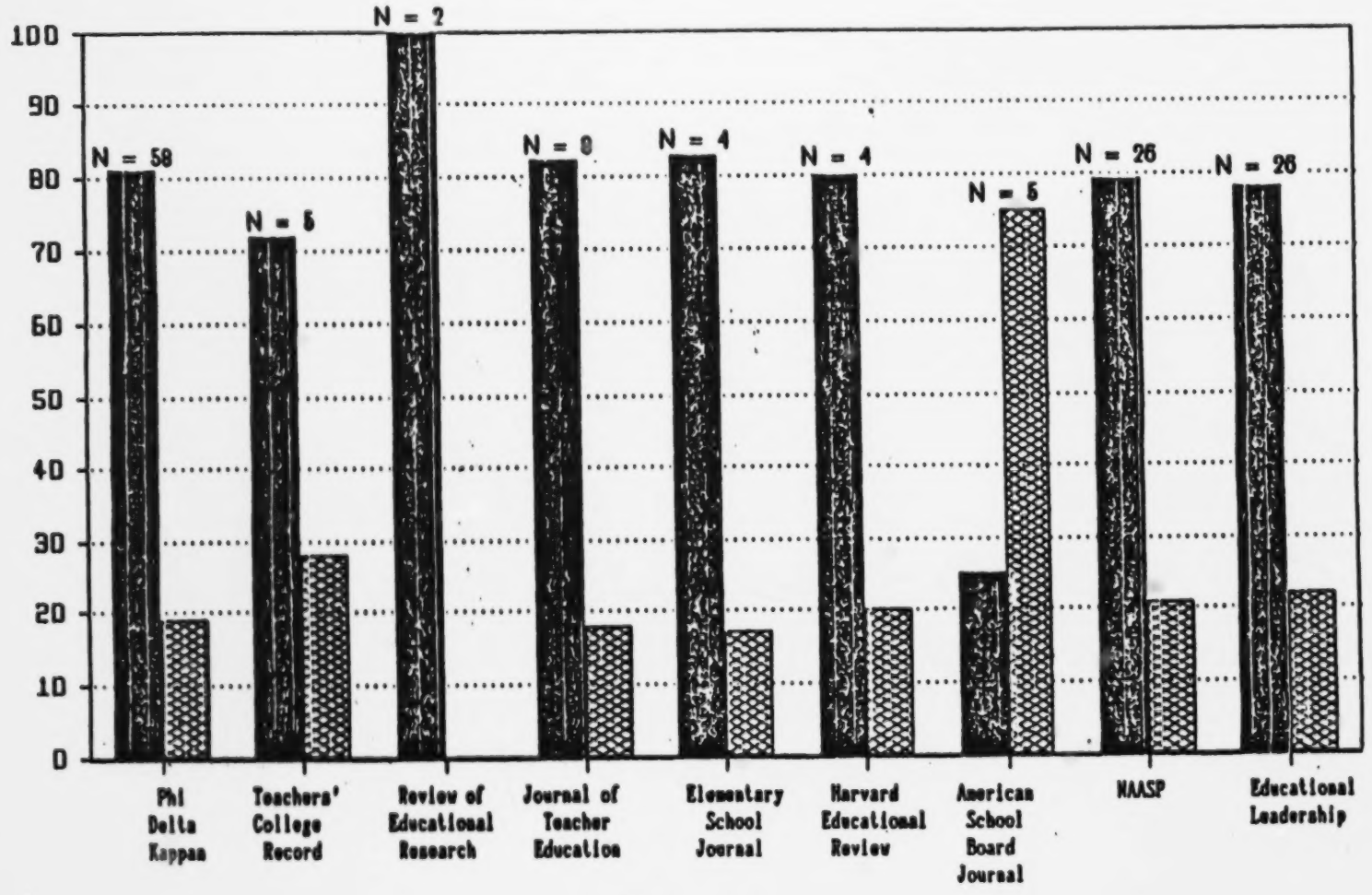
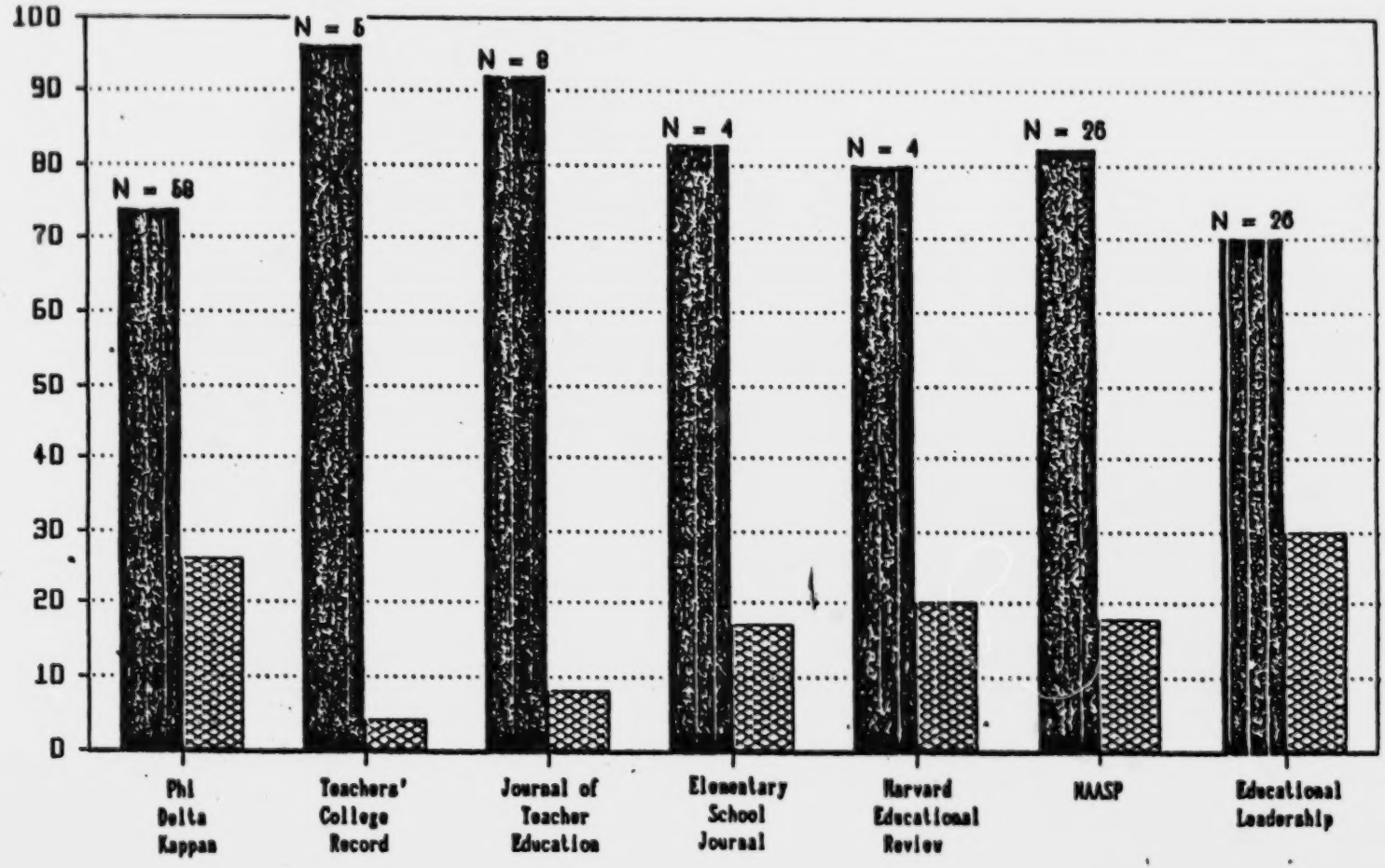


Figure 4

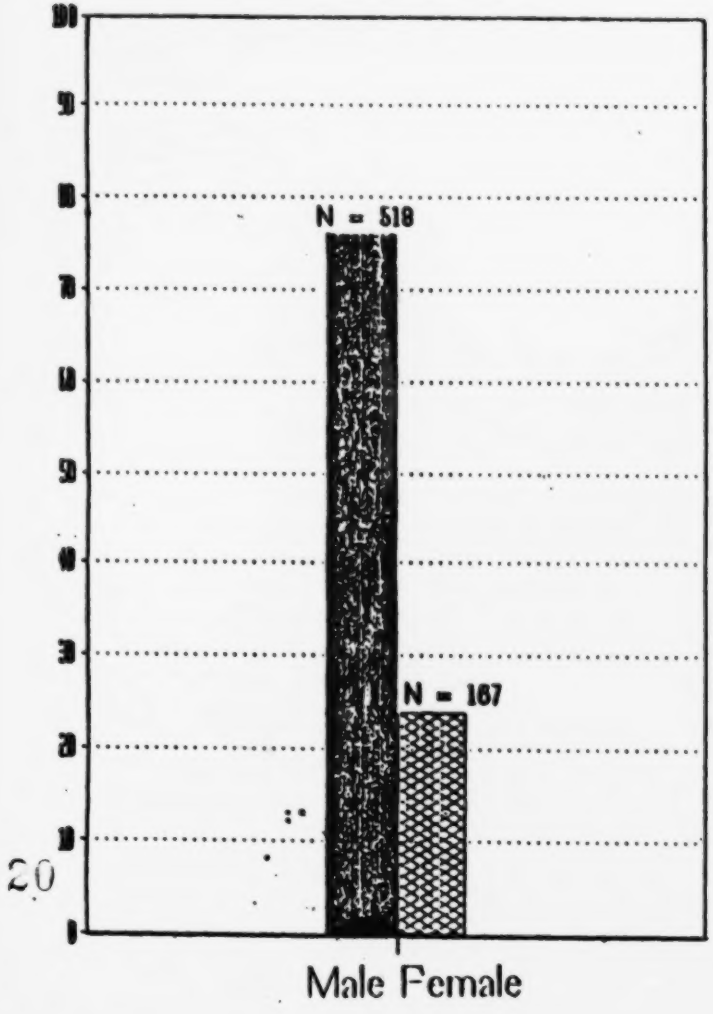
Percentage of Male/Female Bibliographic Citations



* Bibliographic citations by gender were not obtained for the Review of Educational Research and the American School Board Journal.

Figure 5

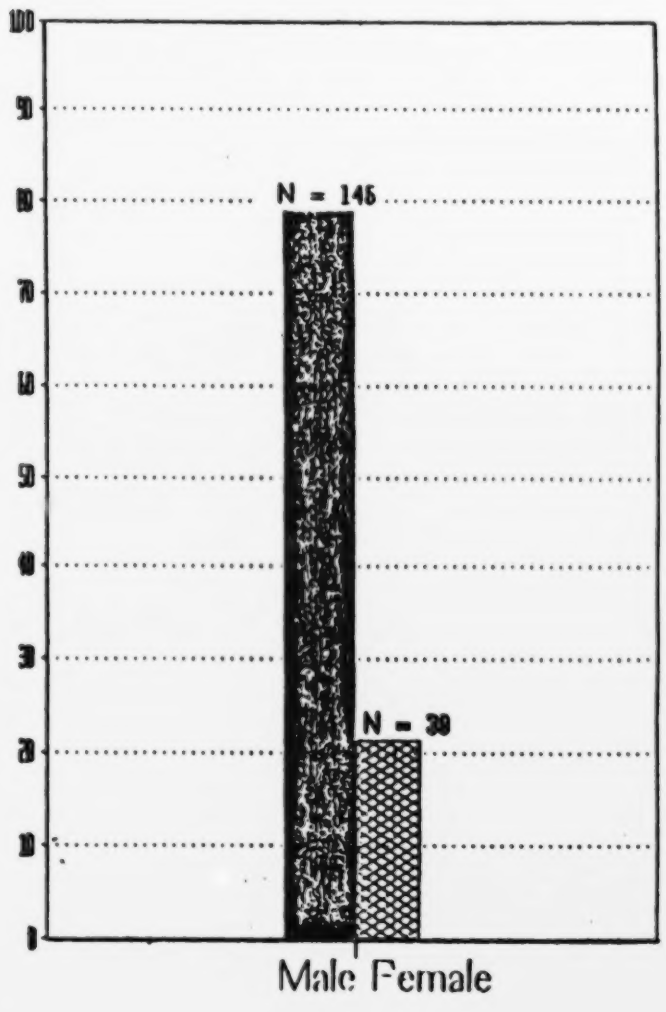
Total of Bibliographic Citations by Sex



Male Female

Figure 6

Total of Reform Article Authorship by Sex



Male Female

(see Figures 7 and 8). While Phi Delta Kappan cartoons are renowned for their humor, they are far less excellent in their representations of the nation's diversity.

Voices from the Classroom: The Forgotten Practitioners

The analysis of professional articles reporting on the reform movement reveals that practicing educators have been relegated to a minor role in improving their own field. Fewer than 10 percent of the articles analyzed were authored by elementary and secondary school teachers or administrators. Those closest to the problems are least likely to be involved in their solutions.

In order to assess the perceptions and reactions of practicing educators to educational reform, a national survey was implemented. Under the director of Sharon Steindam, a project staff member and principal in Arlington County, Virginia, a survey was constructed to assess practitioners' reactions to three major areas:

1. Specific reform recommendations;

2. The impact of the reform movement on daily school practices;

3. The impact of the reform movement on educational opportunities for females and minorities.

Teachers and administrators serving as local and state leaders in three organizations received the survey. Respondents were state representatives in:

1. The National Education Association,

Figure 7

Total of Illustrations Depicting Males, Females and Minorities

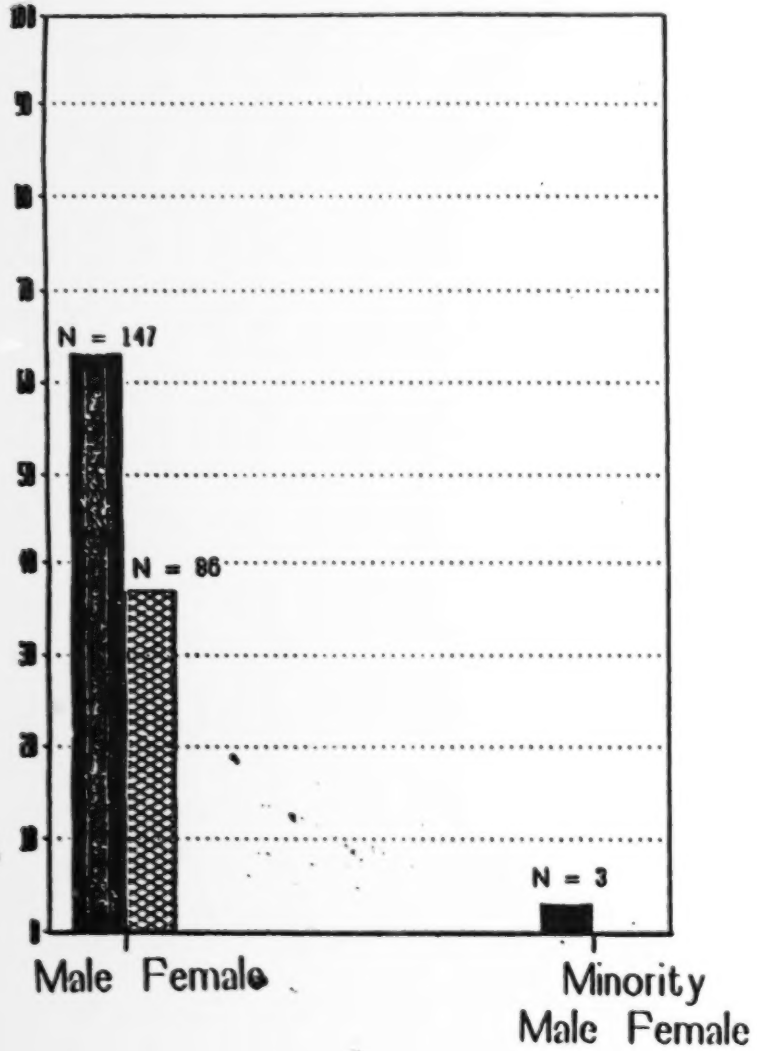
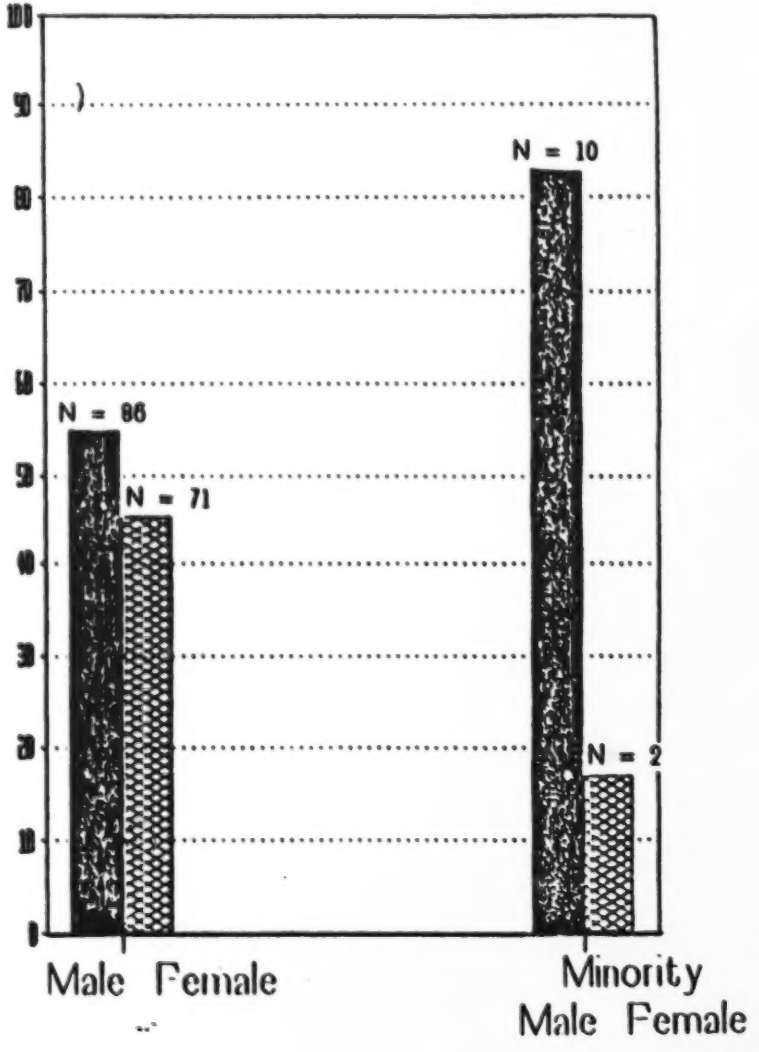


Figure 8

Total of Photographs Depicting Males, Females and Minorities



2. The National Association of Elementary School Principals,

3. The National Association of Secondary School Principals.

In all, 537 surveys were mailed to representatives in every state and 304 surveys were completed and returned (a 57 percent return rate). The vast majority of the 304 respondents were working in school buildings, and they reported their perceptions of the reform movement from the school level. Although most respondents identified many reform recommendations with which they agreed, their responses clearly indicated major disagreements with both the process and content of education reform. Practicing educators took issue with

- the lack of funding to support reform recommendations;
- their exclusion from the process of reforming schools;
- the lack of attention paid to students who are "at risk";
- simplistic solutions or lip service paid to critical and complicated educational problems;
- negative focus on America's schools;
- lack of follow through in research, teacher-training and related areas.

While reactions to the reform movement were often negative, practicing educators did agree with some of the recommended changes. Respondents registered their support for the increased attention being paid to education by the public, the movement

towards higher standards for both teachers and students, and the potential for increased funding for education generally, and teacher salaries in particular. Table 1 reflects the opinions of those surveyed toward specific reform recommendations. Those recommendations garnering the greatest support included higher teacher salaries, higher academic expectations, higher teacher standards, and a stronger curriculum. Practicing educators were less than supportive of a longer school year or a longer school day, merit pay, and the elimination of tracking. While additional analysis is currently underway, preliminary findings indicate a significant schism between teachers and administrators, with teachers far less supportive of many of the reform proposals. This schism may suggest serious barriers to implementation of these proposals in the future.

In general, practicing educators perceive that the reform movement has had only a modest impact at the local level. With the exception of increased academic standards and graduation requirements, most educators report that the national reform movement has yet to reach their local schools (See Table 2).

In terms of educational equity, the majority of educators report that the reform movement has done little to increase educational opportunities for females or minorities (See Table 3). When asked to rank order the factors which have promoted educational opportunities for females and minorities, civil rights legislation and political action are cited before the reform movement. In fact, some of the respondents view the increased

TABLE 1

Opinion of Practicing Educators to Reform Recommendations

	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree
Longer school day/year	44.4%	4.8%	50.8%
Higher academic expectations for all students	92.3	0.3	7.4
Core Curriculum for all students	79.5	5.7	14.8
Elimination of tracking by ability	41.2	8.3	50.5
Increase math/science graduation requirements for all students	60.5	8.7	30.8
Foreign language graduation requirement	48.9	12.2	38.9
Computer Literacy graduation requirements	82.8	6.3	10.9
Community service graduation requirement	38.1	34.5	28.4
Increased admissions requirements for future teachers	75.3	7.6	17.1
Five year teacher education (undergraduate)	52.3	6.2	41.1
Liberal Arts degree with master's degree for teachers	42.0	10.6	47.4
Higher teacher salaries	98.3	0.7	1.0
Merit pay for teachers	39.9	5.7	54.4
Establishment of career ladders	61.1	8.3	30.6

TABLE 2

Perceptions of Practicing Educators to the Local Impact of the Reform Movement in Their School Districts

	Increase	Decrease	No Change
Teacher Salaries	41.4%	4.6%	54.0%
Status of Educators	21.7	12.2	66.1
Teacher Decision Making	38.7	7.9	53.3
Student Motviation	27.6	3.0	69.4
Student Self-Esteem	18.8	4.6	76.6
Student Creativity	9.6	11.9	78.5
Academic Rigor	59.3	1.0	39.7
Student Disciplinary Actions	24.5	7.9	67.5
High School Drop out Rate	22.9	9.9	67.2
High School Graduation Requirements	83.3	1.0	15.7

TABLE 3

Perceptions of Practicing Educators to the Impact of the Reform Movement on Educational Equity

	Yes	No	Don't Know
Has the reform movement increased female(s)			
academic achievement	11.4%	56.5%	32.1%
interest in math and science	17.4	51.8	1.0
entering educational administration	34.4	59.2	6.4
interest in nontraditional careers	31.3	37.0	31.6
participation in sports	32.9	53.0	14.1
self-esteem	23.5	34.2	42.3
retention in school	7.1	51.9	41.1
Has the reform movement increased minority			
academic achievement	21.8%	64.6%	23.5%
interest in math and science	14.0	53.8	32.2
teachers	10.5	77.9	11.6
administrators	16.0	75.8	8.2
entering college prepatory programs	12.0	49.1	38.8
career expectations	20.3	40.7	39.0
self-esteem	19.7	44.1	36.2
retention in school	5.5	58.3	36.2

graduation requirements created by the reform movement as a potential obstacle to students already at risk. They point out that without funding of programs to help students meet these higher standards, more students rather than fewer will be at risk. As one educator put it:

> Someone, it seems, always gets hurt - higher graduation requirements do nothing for the good schools (they already have an excess of credits) but rather hurt the poor devil who is doing his very best and now sees the increased requirements as a final impossible obstacle to overcome in four years.

Another put it more succinctly: "Some want to educate the best and forget the rest."

The survey results also indicate that many respondents are concerned about and even angry with the process of reform itself. Repeatedly, they express their dissatisfaction with a mode of reform that talks at practicing educators rather than with them. They say:

> "Reform needs a view of education from the trenches of the classroom expert."
>
> "[Reform has become] a political issue taken over by governors/legislators with their ideas of reform being only window dressing."
>
> "The people who are making decisions have little understanding of their impact in the classroom."
>
> "When it has all been said and done, there will be more said than done."
>
> "Everyone has become an expert on what's wrong with education."
>
> ". . . teacher-bashing has become a sport."
>
> "Educational reform is more than a placebo of high sounding phrases and uniform rhetoric. It is an everyday effort on the part of teachers to make their students' lives more meaningful . . . Caring, concerned educators are best equipped to decide how and when that can take place. Please listen and ask us."

Gender: Critical Factor in the Quality of Education

There appears to be an underlying assumption that education is gender neutral and that boys and girls have similar experiences because they are in the same school. However, attending the same school does not mean receiving the same quality of educational experience. The reform reports and the professional dialogue they have spawned fail to take into account the substantial body of research concerning different educational experiences and outcomes for boys and girls. Since the reform movement attempts to improve schooling for all our students, this research is central to its success. Consider the following:

o Between 1970 and 1984 the National Assessment of Educational Progress conducted three assessments of reading achievement. While girls continue to outperform boys at the 9, 14 and 17 year-old levels, the achievement gap between the sexes has narrowed as girls' performance remains stable and boys continue to make achievement gains. A 1985 National Assessment of Educational Progress showed that by ages 21-25, males have caught up with females in reading and literacy proficiency.[2]

o Males outperform females substantially on all subsections of the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and the American College Testing Program Examination (ACT). The largest gap is in the math section of the SAT followed by the ACT natural science reading, the ACT math usage, and the ACT social studies reading.[3]

o The College Board Achievement Tests are required for admission to more selective colleges and universities. On these

achievement tests, males outperform females on European history, American history, biology levels 1 and 2, and mathematics.[4]

o Girls attain only 36 percent of the more than 6000 National Merit Scholarships awarded each year. These awards are based on the higher Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Tests (PSAT) scores attained by boys.[5]

o On tests for admission to graduate and professional schools, males outperform females on the Graduate Record Exam (GRE), the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT), and the Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT).[6]

Girls are the only group who enter school scoring ahead, and twelve years later leave school scoring behind. The decline of academic achievement experienced by half our population has been an invisible issue. In the dialogue surrounding education reform, it remains a national blind spot.

The Missing Recommendations

The reform reports have attempted to guide and direct American education into the 21st century, but they have overlooked persuasive evidence that in schools, as in society, gender makes a difference. Girls encounter sex bias in the classroom as well as on the athletic field; although report card grades mask much of this educational deficit, other objective measures, including standardized testing, highlight the need for gender equity in school. Additional recommendations are needed to insure that all of America's children will enjoy a window of opportunity in the nation's classrooms. Although far from inclusive, the following derived from the research litera-

ture as well as recommendations of practicing educators and equity experts, are needs that reform minded educators and citizens will need to address in the years ahead.

Classroom Interaction

o The need to prepare teachers to include all fairly students in classroom interaction. Studies show that boys receive more active and precise teacher attention and feedback.[7]

o The need for more challenging questions and more extended wait time for female and minority students. The vast majority of the recommended reforms have paid inadequate attention to the crux of the educational process - the dynamics of classroom interaction.

Curriculum

o The need to address and remediate academic problem areas for female students, including mathematics and science, in the same ways that remedial reading programs have succeeded in reducing reading problems which historically have plagued boys. With our growing technological economy, the loss of so many of our students from advanced math and science courses represents an economic hardship of national and international significance.

o The need to insure that curricular materials are inclusive and not exclusive, incorporating the interests, experiences and contributions of females and minority groups. The curriculum should involve all students and not appear distant and alien to so many.

Testing

The need to investigate, both within the structure of standardized tests and within the educational process, why females and minority groups score below white males.

o The need to understand the contradiction between girls' higher report card grades and lower standardized tests scores. It is difficult to fathom how the national preoccupation with standardized testing has failed to focus on the lower scores attained by female students.

Counseling and Careers

o The need to confront the continued lack of career mobility for females and minorities.

o The need to reform career counseling and testing programs to avoid course and career segregation and stereotyping.

Structure

o The need for schools to mobilize community and family resources in educating female and minority students, including the exploration of active involvement of parents and the community in the educational process.

o The need to recruit and retain females and minorities to positions of leadership in education.

These needs point out only some of the blind spots in the movement for educational reform. Until attention is paid, one may well ask how girls as well as boys will reach their full potential. Without equity, the quest for excellence so central to reform will remain an elusive goal.

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